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The Forest Wagtail *Motacilla indica* recorded in Nepal

by Kai Curry-Lindahl

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While visiting the Royal Chitwan National Park in southern Nepal, I got an excellent view for several hours of a Forest Wagtail *Motacilla indica* on 30 November 1979, apparently the first record for Nepal.

The bird visited a sand bank in the Rapti River in the northeastern part of the National Park and close to its Headquarters and Research Station. This temporary sand bank was located near the southern shore of the river and partially connected with a small grass covered island. No vegetation covered the bank. Other birds feeding simultaneously on the bank were Indian White Wagtails *M. alba dukhunensis* and White-faced Pied Wagtails *M. a. leucopsis*, as well as Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius*, a Kentish Plover *C. alexandrinus* and a Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*.

The double black gorget and the beige colour above are diagnostic for the Forest Wagtail. Although a typical wagtail in structure and movements this species nevertheless resembles in colour the Ringed and Kentish Plovers in winter plumage, the upper parts of all 3 species being an almost identical light brown in colour. All 3 species could on several occasions be focussed simultaneously with binoculars. It was striking how similar they were, resembling the sandy ground on which they were feeding. The head and dorsal colour of the Forest Wagtail is very well illustrated in Ali (1977), but less well in other handbooks.

The Forest Wagtail observed in Chitwan kept invariably to itself while searching for food and mingled only occasionally with the other birds. It was observed on the sand bar from the morning to the late afternoon of 30 November but was not present there on the preceding and following days; nor was the species observed in other areas of the Royal Chitwan National Park which I visited 19–21 November and 28 November to 1 December.

The species is characterised as a "woodland bird" by several handbooks referring to the winter range of the species (Delacour & Mayr 1946, Delacour 1947, Ali & Ripley 1973). The vegetation-less sand bar in the Rapti River was surrounded by water. The nearest mainland shore consisted of grassland and a bit farther away of riverine forest.

The Forest Wagtail breeds in eastern Asia from eastern Siberia, Sakhalin, Korea and Manchuria to China and, in addition, in an isolated range in northwestern Burma and Assam (Ali & Ripley 1973, McClure 1974, Cheng 1976). It winters mostly in southern China, Indochina, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, and it is an occasional visitor in the northern Philippines. In the eastern Himalayas it is a straggler or scarce passage migrant (Ali 1977). It has reached Kashmir once but not Nepal and Sikkim (Fleming *et al.* 1979). However, Ali & Ripley (1973) state that this species has been recorded on passage in Sikkim both in spring and autumn. A map in McClure (1974) includes Nepal in the winter range but is not supported by data.

According to Ali & Ripley (1973) the Forest Wagtail arrives in its winter quarters in the third week of September. There are several passage records elsewhere in October but none in November, so that the Chitwan individual in late November appears to be exceptional both in time and space.

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